

Welcome to the year of the 'double cohort'

The event we've been hearing about for years is finally here — the year when two sets of graduating high school students enter the post-secondary system together.

Called the 'double cohort,' this mass of high school graduates was predicted to flood the post-secondary system, putting a strain on facilities and services at colleges and universities throughout the province.

But while other institutions may have been bracing for the event, George Brown College has been planning for it and is well prepared to accommodate

the increased number of students enrolled in the college this fall.

Physical improvements

For starters, it's a bigger and better college than it was last year, with new buildings and extensive renovations that have significantly improved the physical environment for students, faculty and staff.

"It's a larger, more user-friendly, safer, brighter and cleaner college," says Bashar Amer, Director of Facilities Management.

Amer says the college has spent over \$55 million to
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First year students Kristel St.ana (Nursing) and Nilaya Dakshi (Wireless Networking) get directions from Student Ambassador Nabi Barghash, a third-year Child Youth Worker student.

A new college identity is being developed

You only have to look around to see that George Brown College is changing. New buildings, extensive renovations and improved services are evident as soon as you walk through the doors.

But Pam Royle, Vice-President of Strategic Positioning, says the change is more than skin deep. Over the past several years, the college has been assuming a new positioning that is more expansive and diverse than the traditional college model.

"Four years ago we embarked on a determined path to renew our direction and we have made significant progress," she says. "We have changed a great deal over the past four years and we will stay true to our strategy going forward, adding more focus and accountability."

For example, says Royle, the college's academic scope has grown far beyond the traditional view to include Bachelor Degrees and Applied Research. Earlier this year, the college was given the go-ahead to develop up to 15 per cent of its programming in applied degrees, in addition to collaborative degrees with universities.

The new buildings, facilities and renovations have created new and improved learning spaces for students and the college's commitment to academic excellence and student service is resulting in substan-

tial improvements in student satisfaction and enrolment.

Central to our positioning, says Royle, is the college's commitment and connection to the city of Toronto and its citizens.

"We have aligned our educational centres with sectors that are driving the future of Toronto's economic growth and social well-being. Our partners represent an outstanding array of Toronto's leading employers."

Despite all this activity, Royle says many people aren't aware how much the college has changed and the fact that

it has been taking on a more comprehensive positioning.

That's why the college is developing a new positioning statement and communication plan, including a new visual identity and logo, that will transform the perception of the college and better reflect the reality of the college today.

Meanwhile, to better reflect the college's urban focus, the college is starting to use 'Toronto City College' in place of 'The City College' with the name George Brown on calendars and recruitment materials.

"We recognize the significant value inherent in the name George Brown and are carefully considering its use with Toronto City College. Over the coming months we will decide on the best ways to use these names to build on
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The essence of the college's positioning is captured in its goals:

We do everything possible to help students succeed.

We do everything possible to help staff succeed.

We act responsibly and with accountability.

We help create the future of Toronto.

Double cohort

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renovate and build new facilities for students. Highlights of these changes include three new buildings, improved classroom space throughout the college, newly renovated washrooms, more library and computer access space for students and the installation of an additional elevator at 200 King Street.

The Sally Horsfall Eaton Centre for Studies in Community Health, a joint venture with Ryerson University, officially opened last October.

The Centre for Financial Services Education at St. James Campus was completed in the spring and features 50,000 square feet of state-of-the-art classroom space, equipment and furnishings.

In the final stages of completion is a 120,000 square foot facility at Casa Loma Campus — the new home of the college's technology programs. In addition to its state-of-the-art design and furnishings, the building features a new Student Centre, food court and restaurant on its main floor.

In response to student concerns, washrooms at the college are getting a much-needed facelift. Two of the busiest washrooms in the college — on the cafeteria level at Casa Loma — were gutted and renovated over the summer and are being transformed with new fixtures, finishings, colour and lighting. These will serve as prototypes as the college moves forward with renovating all its washrooms.

Expanded study and library services

The college has also expanded its open access computing capacity and learning resource services to meet the demands of a larger student population and to improve service, says

John Hardy, Director of Educational Resources.

"We're following our strategic plan for educational resources in the college," says Hardy. "We're moving toward the creation of 'learning commons' that will combine open access labs and learning resource centres into fully-integrated centres on each campus."

Major renovations took place at Casa Loma Campus over the summer to create the new learning commons. As part of the renovation, about 40 additional computer workstations have been added and study and media facilities improved.

Approximately 55 workstations have been added at St. James Campus by expanding open access computing into the basement next to the cafeteria. Eventually the open access labs on the two levels will be linked. Media and study facilities at St. James have also been improved.

"At both campuses, we will also be moving to create laptop-ready workstations to support students in laptop programs," says Hardy.

In addition to more space and workstations, the college has hired more staff in education resources, including two librarians and two user service representatives, and has increased the hours of operation of the open access labs. Casa Loma students will now have library services on Sundays as well — a service that was introduced at St. James last winter.

Hardy says there has been an increased emphasis on making 'virtual' resources and services available to students. Working with a consortium of colleges, George Brown now offers the services of VAL — Virtual Academic Librarian — on the college website.

VAL lets students chat with a librarian on-line for guidance and assistance. The project is still in the pilot stages and is available Monday to Thursday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Friday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. As more colleges join the consortium — particularly colleges in different time zones — the hours of operation will expand with a long-term goal of 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

More staff and faculty

Hiring of faculty and support staff has increased as well, says Nancy Hood, Executive Director of Human Resources. Between April 1 and July 31 this year, the college hired 29 new full-time faculty and 10 replacement full-time faculty — the same number of faculty hired over the full year last year.

A total of 61 full-time support staff have also been hired since April 1 this year.

"It's been a very positive time for us," says Hood. "It's exciting to be able to hire so many new faculty and support staff."

More students

Applications to George Brown this fall were up by 17.2 per cent — well above the overall provincial college total of 6.6 per cent.

However, while the final tally of new student registrations isn't available yet, Registrar Barry Hemmerling says it's likely going to be less than expected.

This is true across the college system, says Hemmerling, adding that even the universities haven't got the influx they were predicting.

"System-wide, it hasn't materialized the way we thought it would. The general information we're getting is that significant numbers of students have decided to stay

in high school for another semester."

If that is the case, says Hemmerling, the growth will probably be spread out over a few years and George Brown is well positioned to deal with it.

Younger students

It's interesting to note that, quite apart from the double cohort, there has been a trend toward a younger student body in recent years, says Franky Chernin, Director of Student Success.

Chernin says tracking shows that 55 per cent of the entering students who took the placement test last year were under the age of 20 — up significantly from 40 per cent in 1998. (About half of all first semester students take the placement test.)

"The average age of first year students is decreasing every year," says Chernin. "It's something we've been noticing and we've had discussions with staff and faculty about what we should be doing differently in terms of teaching strategies and service delivery."

She said the reasons for the lower age of first year students is probably a result of more students opting for college rather than university and students coming straight to college from high school instead of going into the workforce.

"Whatever the reason, it's happening and it's having an impact on the way we operate," says Chernin. We need to open discussion, raise the issues and collect actual experiences on how it is affecting the way we offer assistance."

She said counsellors in Student Affairs and staff in the Staff Development Office are available to assist front-line staff and faculty members in dealing with issues related to younger students.

Gearing up for a successful start-up

It's all systems go for a smooth and successful start-up this year.

"It's a busy time of the year, that's for sure," says Lidia Pirraglia, Coordinator of Registration. "But every year we get better and better at it."

Preparations and work began early in the summer to prepare for the new school year, with services such as on-line registration and timetable retrieval helping to cut down on the number of students who will be standing in line for services during the two weeks of start-up.

Also available on-line is the document *What's Happening Where, The Guide to Start-Up – September 2003*, which gives students all the information they need about

where to go, what to do and what the hours of operation are.

For students without access to the Internet, the college will be ready with extended hours, extra staff and plenty of copies of *What's Happening Where* to hand out to students.

"We'll be doing what we always do," says Pirraglia, adding that there will be extra help available this year from student ambassadors, provided in conjunction with the Student Life Cycle project and the Student Association.

A total of 30 student ambassadors – 15 per campus – will be available in the main lobbies to greet students, answer questions and direct students to service areas.



Welcoming new staff

The Official City in the College Tour, held Aug. 26, took new college staff on an orientation tour of the city and college, wrapping up with a trade show and reception at Siegfried's. Enjoying the refreshments are new staff members (from left): Natalie Deveaux, faculty, Fashion Management; Maurizio Dodaro, faculty, General Arts and Science; Stacey Mauger, support staff, Human Resources; Khalid Danok, faculty, Information Technology; and Jim Mitkovski, part-time faculty, Information Technology.

New identity

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our rich history and fuel our vision for the future. Substantial research, discussion and transparency will be part of any decision."

The project began this summer and a decision on the final direction is expected in January with a detailed communication and implementation plan to follow in February or March.

Members of the college community are encouraged to get involved. Focus groups representing college staff, faculty and students were held over the summer and further input will be sought as the project continues. For example, an on-line survey will be conducted later in the fall and implementation teams will assist in the transition.

To learn more or to express your views, contact Pam Royl at ext. 4477 or e-mail at proyl@gbrownc.on.ca.

Student Life Cycle project is making a difference in college life

The Student Life Cycle (SLC) project is committed to making George Brown and the college experience better for everybody and has been working in conjunction with the start-up committee to help make sure the start-up process runs more smoothly.

"The SLC is bringing together people from all areas of the college to develop solutions that will work," says Brenda Pipitone, SLC project team leader.

For example, the 15 student ambassadors located in the main lobbies of the campuses during start-up, who are greeting students, answering their questions and directing them to their destinations, are the result of an initiative of the SLC project.

In addition, newly renovated washroom facilities on the

cafeteria level at Casa Loma will be opening soon and are the result of an SLC project recommendation. Eventually, all the college washrooms will undergo a similar transformation.

Some other changes that have been part of the SLC mandate are:

New signs to direct students, including large directories at both campuses.

The creation of special student spaces with new furniture.

Redesign of the student information system and improvement of all systems and processes to make user interaction easier, whether by phone, web or in person.

The student service centre project unites existing and new college services to provide students with access to all

types of information, help and solutions to a variety of problems — located all in one place. The new centres are slated to be open in September 2004 at both St. James and Casa Loma campuses.

Pipitone says the success of the SLC initiative depends upon the college community getting involved in the process.

"We need to hear from the whole college community," says Pipitone. "Their participation and suggestions are an important contribution to the next phase of SLC work."

For more information about the Student Life Cycle Project, call Brenda Pipitone at ext. 2614 or Wayne Poirier at ext. 2456 or e-mail at slc@gbrownc.on.ca.

We're doing everything possible to help students succeed

"We do everything possible to help students succeed." That's one of the college's major goals and the rationale behind a new initiative aimed at increasing student retention.

Franky Chernin, Coordinator in Student Affairs, has been seconded to a new position as Director of Student Success. Her one-year mission is to work with each division to identify, develop and implement one project that addresses academic success and increased retention of students in that division.

"We have to be accountable," says Chernin. "When we accept a student, we have an obligation to do everything possible to ensure that student can be successful academically."

Chernin says current statistics indicate that 17 per cent of students in semester one don't go on to semester two. That translates into a lot of students, she says, and



Franky Chernin, Director of Student Success

is a major reason for aiming a variety of services and supports at first semester students to get them started off on the right foot.

There are many reasons why students drop out — including financial and personal reasons, depression and stress — and the college

is actively addressing these issues with services in counseling, special needs services and financial assistance.

"We need to address the key performance indicators relating to students' feelings that the college cares about their success," says Chernin. "The early advisement aspect

of these projects will begin to address those issues of feedback and perceived caring."

But Chernin says research also shows that many students don't have the academic competency to be successful. And initiatives aimed at pre-testing and foundation courses in math and English, while helpful, are not enough to ensure a student will do well.

She said the college's decision to take this kind of approach to academic advisement and student retention recognizes the critical need to help students succeed, while acknowledging that one size doesn't fit all.

"Each division has different issues and needs. I will work with each one to create a project that is tailored to that division," says Chernin, adding that an important aspect of each project will be creating and collecting data and tracking results.

Impressive new Student Centre to open at Casa Loma

Occupying the entire main floor of the new technology building at Casa Loma, the new Student Centre will send a positive message to students, says Angelina Vaz, Student Association Executive Director.

"For most students entering the building, the Student Centre will be the first thing they see and they'll know right away that their student union fees are being put to good use," says Vaz. "It also really helps to raise our profile in the college."

Vaz says the 20,000 square foot centre, which officially opens October 9, provides a host of services to students in a large, open, modern environment.

"We're thrilled that our partnership with the college has allowed us to have such a great new space. I think it really demonstrates the support and caring that this college has for its students."

Featured in the new centre are offices for student association representatives and staff, a Life Works Centre, offering a range of student support and advocacy services, fully accessible meeting rooms, a quiet lounge and a clubs room, where clubs and organizations can meet, use the computers and store supplies.

Adjacent to the college food court, the Student Association is operating a Treats coffee shop, a Subway franchise and a full service bar

and restaurant. The licensed restaurant will be open for lunch with a cafeteria-style service and feature a full-service dinner menu with a capacity to seat about 100 people.

Other services include a photocopy and print shop and a retail shop selling convenience items, newspapers and magazines.

Vaz says a section of the centre that is now an arcade with pool tables and videogames will eventually be converted to a medical centre for students.

"We think it will be a terrific service for students. We're trying to be proactive and innovative," says Vaz.

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